

CHINESE IN CALIFORNIA

THEIR CHARACTER AND HABITS.
THE CHINESE AT HOME AND ABROAD. By WIL-
LIAM E. FARWELL, San Francisco; A. L. Bancroft
& Co., New York: White, Stokes & Allen.

This book was published by Messrs. Bancroft & Co., of San Francisco, shortly before the great fire which destroyed the stock of that firm, and White, Stokes & Allen, of this city, are perhaps the only booksellers who have any copies for sale at present. The work consists of two parts: the first is a compendious arrangement of statements concerning the character, habits and mode of life of the Chinese, at home and abroad, derived largely from standard works, the reports of missionaries and travellers in the Middle Kingdom, and the experience of police officers, merchants and others who have had special opportunities of studying the "little brown men" in California. The second part of the volume is occupied with the report of the Special Committee of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco on the condition of the Chinese in that city.

Mr. Farwell has gathered a great deal of evidence which tells heavily against the Chinese as desirable immigrants. His representations are the more forcible for the absence of that extravagance of statement which visitors so much of the staple anti-Chinese polemic. He has not been afraid to give favorable testimony when it comes to hand, and with perhaps one exception the general conclusion to be inferred is well supported. The exception is an attempt to make it appear that drunkenness is a common Chinese vice. While there is no doubt that drunken Chinese may be found, it is notorious that as a rule those who come to this country have been found so temperate that this characteristic has always constituted one of their chief recommendations to employers of labor.

What Mr. Farwell shows very strongly, however, is that the Chinese have no assimilative tendency, and that their moral character is degraded; and that they are extremely filthy in their ways of living. Concerning this point in the indictment it may be said in passing that some confusion has arisen owing to the fact that much evidence exists for the personal cleanliness of the Chinese. The truth is, as has often been asserted, that many if not most of them do take pains to keep their bodies clean than the generality of poor white men are accustomed to do; but it is equally true that the Chinese tolerate an amount of filth and insanitary conditions in their dwellings which no white men, even of the dirtiest possible habits, would endure.

The statements made in this volume regarding the abominations in which the San Francisco (and all the California) Chinese live, may be considered exaggerated, but they are really simple representations of fact, as all know who have visited a Chinese-quarter in an American city. Indeed, so revolting are the surroundings of these strange people, that where they live in comparative health the presumption is that white people would be attacked by taphos in a very short time—supposing they could be persuaded to make the experiment. Another curious fact referred to by Mr. Farwell is that hundreds of thousands of Chinese, employed as house servants, and spending their days in clean and wholesome houses, actually insist on passing their nights in the filth and squalor of the Chinese quarter. What a Chinaman can stand in the way of poverty and contemptuous habitation has never been ascertained, but it is certain that he will live cheerfully and contentedly under conditions which would drive a self-respecting pig to suicide. And this constitutes one of the strongest arguments against unrestricted Chinese immigration, for experience has proven that Chinese competition in the labor market cannot be met by white men unless such success in such competition could only be attained by descending to the Chinese mode of living; and that would involve a degradation of the American citizen far below the lowest point to which European mis-government and despotism has reduced any race in the old world.

The industry of the Chinese may be admitted, and their frugality, and their trustworthiness as laborers. But none of these good qualities in their case, lead to nothing. When a white man improves his social condition, lives in a better home, educates his children more carefully, diffuses happiness and comfort in many ways, and so helps the community as well as himself. Not so with the Chinaman. In the first place, he despises this country and its people. The strength and persistence of his inherited national conceit are almost incredible. The one ambition of his life is to go back to China with enough to live upon there. He is a bird of passage. Here he will endure the utmost squalor to save money. He pays no attention to the civilization around him. He regards it with contemptuous indifference. He is in fact just as far from desiring to become a citizen of the United States as Americans in China are from wishing to become subjects of the Emperor. The Chinese in California, more or less, are in the government of their own, and to a great extent free American law. The insuperable difficulties of their language assist them in this. For many years Chinese placards offering rewards for murder of persons obnoxious to one or another of the six companies or some of their offshoots have been at intervals boldly affixed to the walls in Chinatown; and what is more the murders so arranged to have in most cases been committed with business-like punctuality. It has long been impossible to administer justice among these people. By systematic perjury by the capricious and tempestuous juries, the processes of the local courts are evaded, and unless white testimony is available it is rarely that a Chinese criminal can be convicted.

The evidence presented by Mr. Farwell tends irresistibly to the conclusion that all temporizing measures taken in the Chinese question must prove inadequate. The experience of California with the Chinese is only a repetition of that of the Philippine Islanders 200 years ago. Then the evil attained such proportions that after valiantly attempting to meet it with though measures, the people at last rose, and massacre followed. And in every land colonized by Chinese the same evils, the same trouble have occurred. The people are evidently hopelessly unassimilable. They carry China with them wherever they go. They plant the traditions of the oldest nation in the West. They learn no new thing, save such as will help them to make money. They easily undersell all other laborers, and can undercut all other labor. They are never to be despised, but always to be feared. To be feared as representing, with formidable virility and persistence, not only an alien but an arrested civilization. China is to-day the incarnation of a realism so dense, so materialistic, so utterly void of all idealism, that it stands for the most sordid plane of human life conceivable. It is incomestable that this swarming nation of indefatigable workers offers to the intellectual supremacy of the Northern races very tempting opportunities. Wealth beyond the dreams of avarice is attainable through this willing auxiliary. But wealth at what a cost! To accept the Chinaman as a business partner is to employ the agency which so nearly ruined the Southern States. And under such a condition of things, the negroes.

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